*Implementation of Actor Model*

*Abstract*—To take the benefit of hardware concurrent computational models is growing rapidly. The advancements in cloud computing technologies such as microsoft azure service bus allows improving the computational speed. This paper illustrates how the actor model system is implemented on top of the microsoft azure service bus. Actor model implementation provides a higher level of abstraction that makes it easier to write concurrent, parallel and distributed systems. Actors are objects which encapsulates the state and behaviour, they communicate exclusively by exchanging messages which are placed into the recipients mailbox. A consistent way of understanding of dotnet actor libraries have also been provided in this paper. By learning about dotnet actor model, from this paper, the knowledge about deep set of tools that solve the distributed/parallel problems in a uniform programming model is also gained.

**Keywords— *Concurrency, Microsoft Azure Service Bus, Actors, Threads, Topics, Queues, Azure Cosmos DB***

# **Introduction**

In this era of cloud computing and distribution systems concurrency has played a vital role in achieving fast results with low latency. Concurrency is a property of the system to execute multiple activities at the same time. It means how components should work in a concurrent computational environment.

The actor model is a conceptual concurrent computation model, came into the picture in 1973[1]. It establishes some of the rules on how the system’s components should behave and interact with each other [3]. An actor in the actor model can be represented as a fundamental unit of computation and it can perform actions such as create another actor, send a message and designate how to handle the next message. Actors are lightweight and millions of them can be created very easily. Also, it is important to note that it takes fewer resources than threads. An actor has its private state and a mailbox, like a messaging queue. A message which an actor gets from another actor is stored in the mailbox and is processed in FIFO (first in and first out) order. Actors can be considered as the form of object-oriented programming which communicates by exchanging messages. Also, actors have a direct lifecycle that is they are not automatically destroyed when no longer referenced, and once created it is a user’s responsibility to eventually terminate them. This enables the user to control how the resources are released. Furthermore, in the case of distributed environments actors can communicate with each other through messages if they have the address of other actors. Actors can have local or remote addresses [1]. The most widely used implementations for the Actor model are Akka and Erlang [1].

The main inspiration behind actor model is to take full advantage of the hardware by using concurrency. Concurrency means that the ability of the system to perform different tasks simultaneously or out of order without affecting the outcome. DotNetActors is an essential element in the actor model and is responsible to handle the communication between the client and Microsoft’s Azure Service Bus. The paper is structured as follows; Section II covers the general workflow. Section III explains the Implementation of the Actor Model System. Results are presented in sections IV.

# **General Workflow**

The main objective of this paper is to implement the system that is very easy to use and provides high computation. To achieve this latest high end technologies have been used such as Microsoft’s Azure Service Bus (Topics & Queues) & Cosmos DB to store the entities into the database. Following is a brief description about them:

* 1. *Azure Service Bus:* “Microsoft Azure Service Bus is a fully manages enterprise message broker with message queues and publish-subscribe topics” [5]. It provides many benefits such as load balancing the load across different workers, transferring the data safely, and coordinating transactional work. The service bus is a platform as a service (PaaS) with an additional feature that azure takes care of such as Logging, managing space, handling backups, worrying about hardware failure, etc. The main protocol used is Advanced Messaging Queuing Protocol (AMQP) 1.0. In a Service Bus, namespaces are the containers for all the messaging components. Multiple queues and topics can be in a single namespace. “A Service Bus namespace is your capacity slice of a large cluster made up of dozens of virtual machines” [5]. Due to this, it provides all the availability and robustness benefits on a very large scale.
  2. *Queues (Azure Service Bus):* In our implementation queues are used to send the replies to the clients. In genral queues can send and receive messages. Messages are stored in the Queues until the receiving application has received and processed them. Fig1 depicts the queue with a sender and a receiver.

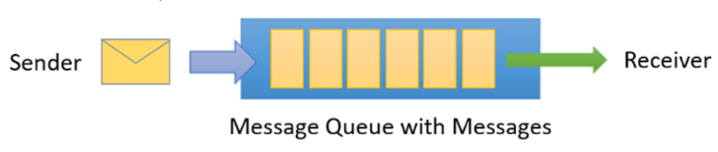
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Fig1. Microsoft Azure Queue [5]

On arrival, the messages in queues are ordered and timestamped. It is spread across availability zones once accepted by the broker. It is always held in triple-redundant storage. Once the client has accepted the message service bus never leaves the messages in memory or volatile storage. Messages are only delivered when requested, which means they are delivered in pull mode. A pull model is not like busy-polling mode, the pull operation can be long-lived and gets completed once the message is available[5].

* 1. *Topics (Azure Service Bus):* In our implementation topics are used to receive the messages from the clients. Topics in comparison to queues can also be used to send and receive messages. As stated above queues are used for point-to-point communication, whereas topics on the other hand are used in publishing/subscribe scenarios.[5]. Fig2 depicts a topic with one sender and multiple receivers.

**Table

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Fig2. Microsoft Azure Topic [5]

The key difference is that multiple and independent subscriptions can attach to a topic, apart from this it works exactly like a queue. Copy of each message that is sent to a topic is received by a subscriber. “Subscriptions are names as entities” [5]. A set of rules can be defined in a subscription known as a filter which can keep a check on which message to be copied to a subscription and an optional action that can modify the message metadata [5].

* 1. *Azure Table Storage:* In our implementation tables are used to store the actors so that they can be loaded easily. Azure table storage or Cosmos DB Table API serves as storage for structured data in the cloud with schema-less design. This makes it easier to adapt the data as per the requirement of the application. Table storage can be utilized for storing flexible datasheets and other types of metadata as per the service requirements. Table storage is consisting of a storage account, storage table, and entities, as shown in Fig1. [4]

**Diagram

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Fig3. Microsoft Azure Topic [5]

Using the above mentioned technologies a potent infrastructure has been implemented as shown in Fig4. It can be seen that the communication takes place between client and the dotnet actor host service via service bus. Client implements an actor and sends a message to service bus (topics), Host subscribes the message from the topics and processes it. After that service stores the respective actor in a table and then sends a reply to the service bus (queue). Client then gets the reply from the service bus (queue) . All these steps have been numbered in the Fig4.

Diagram

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1. Client that creates an Actor and sends the message to the Topic.

2. Actor Service Host fetches the message from the Topic.

3. Actor Service Host persistes the Actor in a Table

4. Actor Service Host sends a reply to the Queue

5. Client gets the reply from the Queue.

Fig4. General Workflow

As illustrated in Fig4 there are five steps that gets processed when a client sends a message. To get a better understanding these steps have be divided into client and service steps. Two steps are processed by the client whereas three steps are processed by the service. These steps have been explained in three parts below.

1. *Client sends a request:* As illustrated in Fig4, in step 1 a client implements an Actor by initializing Actor System and calls its *Ask()* method. By calling the *Ask()* method client sends a messge to the Topic and then waits to get a reply from the reply messaage queue.
2. *DotnetActor Host Service Procesing*: As shown in the Fig4, in step2. service subscribes the message from the Topic and processes it in a asynchronous way. After processing the actor message, as a next step service stores the actor into the Cosmos DB table for future use. After that service prepares the reply message and sends it to the reply message queue as shown in Fig4, step 4.
3. *Client receives the response:* In the final step that is step 5 client gets the reply message from the Queue.

As shown above it can be inferred out that how easy and quickly an actor system can be established to achieve the high computation. Lets have a look at the detailed explaination of the code used to implement such a powerful system in the next section.

# **CODE DESCRIPTION**

In this section a detailed explaination the code used to implement the architecture as illustrated in Fig4 has been covered. As shown in section II, Fig4 the client create an actor and calls the *ASK()* method. Service then processes the message by subscribing it from a topic and sends the reply to the queue where it is available to the client. Lets discuss about Actors, Client and Service in more detail.

# *Actor:*

An actor is a container that encapsulates the state, behaviour and mailbox. An actor can modify its state and behaviour . It provides the highlevel abstraction for writing concurrent and distributed systems. It makes easier for a developer to to write correct concurrent and parallel systems. In our implementation ActorBase.cs class available in the service DotNetActors is the base class used by all the clients as shown in Fig5.

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Fig5. Code snippet showing Actor base class

It can be seen in the Fig?? that ActorLibrary solution implements MyActor.cs class that extends the ActorBase class. Now as per the requirement clients needs to add a *Receive()* method as illustrated in the Fig6

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Fig6. Code snippet showing client’s actor class

The implemented *Receive()* method registers the receive handler, that means how the service should respond to the received data type. In the Fig?? highlighted method is for a String, that means the service will invoke this action when a String data type is received.

# *Client:*

Client creates an actor and sends a message to the service. To implement an actor in a client, firstly an ActorSystem should be implemented by providing the basic configurations as shown in fig7

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Fig7. Code snippet showing ActorSystem initialization

In the configurations information such as servicebus connection string, service bus queue name, service bus topic name and the actor system name should be provided as shown in fig8.

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Fig8. Code snippet showing general configurations

After successfully creating the Actor System, an actor can be created by using the method *CreateActor()* as shown in fig8. Once the actor is created then *Ask()* method can be called which will start the step 1 as shown in general workflow Fig4, section II.

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Fig8. Code snippet showing general configurations

# *Service*

The service as depiected in SectionII, fig4 fetches the messages from the topics and sends the reply messages to the queue. Lets discuss about its implementation in more detail. The execution of service is implemented by the class Program.cs. It is situated in the DotNetActorsHost solution in the project folder as shown in Fig9.

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Fig9. Code snippet showing

Service solution

In the Program.cs file there is the main method that starts the Host application is shown in Fig10

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Fig10. Code snippet showing Main method of the service

To run the Service the following command line arguments must be passed that are *SystemName*, *RequestMessageTopic, RequestMsgQueue, ActorSystemName and SubscriptionName.*

* *RequestMessageTopic*: It is a Service Bus Topic from where the service will subscribe the client messages.
* *RequestMsgQueue*: It is a Service Bus Queue where the output results are pushed for the client.
* *SubscriptionName*: It is the node for the Topic from where the service should subscribe its messages

*Its important to note that clients should have the same configurations as the service is having else the communication will not take place.*

Also, before starting the service it is important to set up the ServiceBus connection string as an environment variable else the service will throw null pointer exception. It cannot be passed as an command line argument for security reasons. Once the service has been started the first method that is being called is *Start()* method.

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Fig11. Code snippet showing configurations set-up for the service

As shown in the Fig?? when the *start()* is called the service initializes its variables with values. The variables that are initialized are *ServiceBusConnectionString*, *RequestMsgTopic* (Topic name from where the client messages must be subscribed), *RequestMessageSubscription* (Topic Node), *rcvQueue* (Queue where reply need to be pushed) and *TblStoragePersistenceConnStr* (To access the Table where the actors are required to be stored).

After the service is configured successfully, ActorSystem object is created. In the next step ActorSystem object calls the *start()* method as shown in Fig12

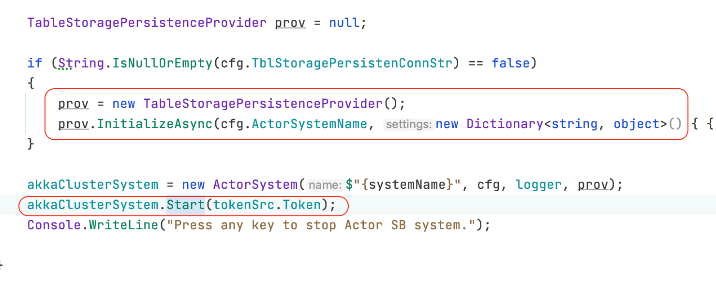
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Fig12. Code snippet showing start method call by ActorSystem.

In the *start()* method an infinite while loop starts which only stops when a cancellation token is passed to it. Otherwise it keeps on subscribing the topic messages from the service bus. Once the message is received *RunDispatcherForSession()* method is called to process the received message as shown in Fig13.

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Fig13. Code snippet showing RunDispatcherForSession method.

In the *RunDispatcherForSession()* method there are number of steps that are executed. Lets discuss them turn by turn

Step1. At first the message type is checked if it is null, then an exception is thrown and execution is terminated which returns the control back to the while loop where the message subscription from the Topic is happening.

Step2. In the next step it is checked if an Actor is exisiting in a cache. If it exists then it is directly loaded from there. If not then it is checked if the actor has been persisted in the databse, if yes then it is loaded from there. In case an actor it is not found in the database too, then it is considered as a new entry and is stored in the cache with the key as SessionsID. It is important to note that service uses the session receive as a key to ensure that messages are sent to the same session id as actor id that are received in order as they have been sent. It is one of the important design decision that has been taken into consideration while implementing this robust service.

Step3. In this step the received message is deserialized and required operations are perfomed as per its data type as shown in Fig14

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Fig14. Code snippet showing

InvokeOperationOnActorAsync method.

In the *actor.Invoke()* method the operation defined by the client takes place. If the operation is sccussefully completed a response message is created for the clients.

Step4. It is checked if the persistence is enabled that is if the actor needs to be stored or not. If yes then it is persisted using the method *persistAndCleanupIfRequired()* as shown in Fig15

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Fig15. Code snippet showing PersistActor method

Step5. After this a reply is sent to the queue using the method *sendReplyQueueClients().* In this method the response message that was created in Step3 is pushed to the queue from where it is available to the.

# **How to run the solution**

In this section a step by step guide has been provided on how to run the service and client. An illustration to each step has also been provided.

1. Dotnet Actor Service:

In this section steps to run instructions for the service have been written. Each step has a figure that provides more information to execute that step.

Step1. In the first step service bus connection string needs to be set up as an environment variable as shown in the fig16

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Fig16. Service bus connection string as an environment variable

Step2. Open the terminal in the DotNetActorsHost solution folder and enter the below command as shown in fig17

*dotnet run*

*--SystemName=HelloCluster*

*-- RequestMsgTopic=actorsystem/actortopic*

*-- RequestMsgQueue=actorsystem/actorqueue*

*--ActorSystemName=actorsystem*

*--SubscriptionName=default*

Hit enter after entering the command. It will start the service

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Fig17. Service bus connection string as an environment variable

That’s it service is up and running.

1. Dotnet Actor Client:

In this section steps to implement and run the client are provided. An illustration to each step is also provided to ease the implementation.

Step 1. First step is to implement a method and create an ActorSystem object. The pass the configurations as shown in fig??. The configurations should have the same topic, as used to start the service.

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Fig18. Code snippet showing actor configurations for client

Step 2. Implement a class which extends the ActorBase class and implement the *Receive()* method as per the requirement as shown in Fig19

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Fig19. Code snippet showing actor base class for client

Step 3. Using ActorSystem object, create an actor as shown in fig??. Then call *Ask()* method to get the result from the service. That’s it, run this method from the Main() method.

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Fig20. Code snippet showing actor creation for client

# **V. Results**

The extensive stream of methods discussed in this paper takes much less time on accounts of running the experiment. It's due to the robustness of the Microsoft Azure Service Bus and our implemented actor model system. The following images illustrate the running code.

Fig21 shows the service logs when the service is running

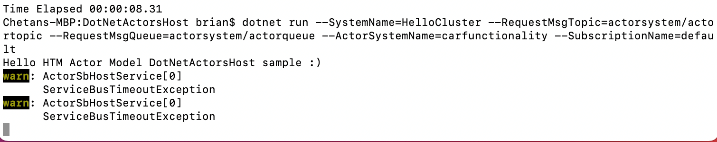


Fig21. Actor Host Service running

Fig22 shows the client logs when the client starts.

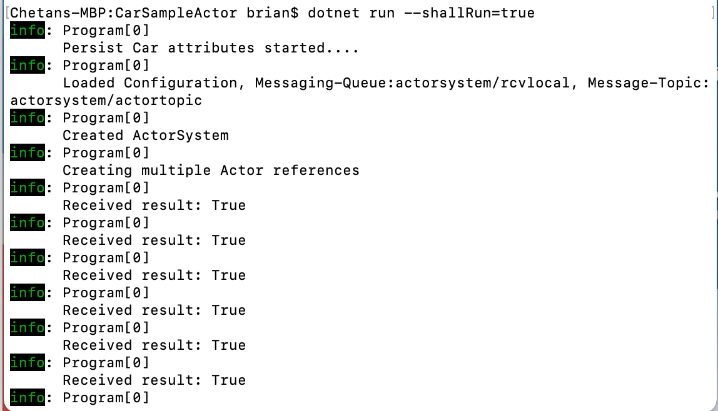


Fig22. Sample client solution running

Fig23 represents the service logs when messages are received from the client.

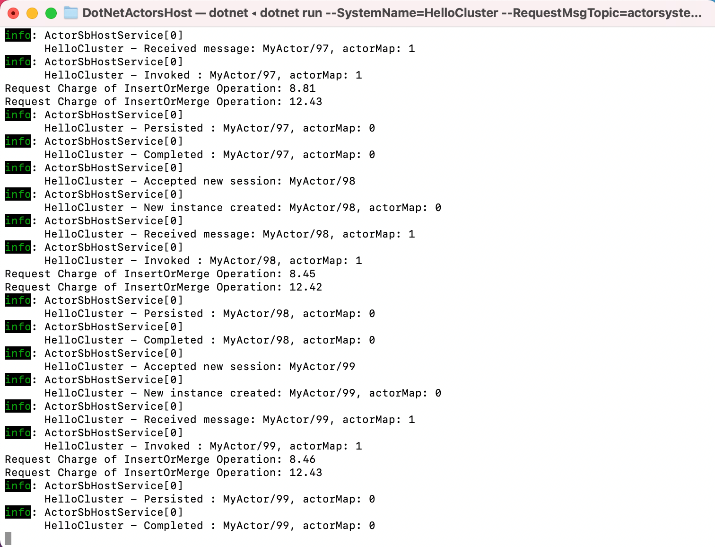


Fig23. Dotnet Actor Host Service Logs

Fig24 shows the persisted entities in Cosmos DB.

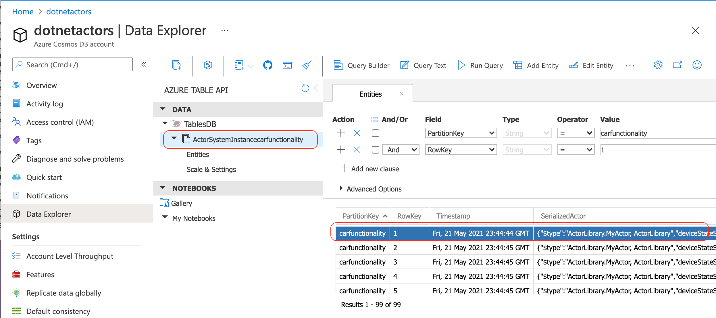


Fig24. Cosmos DB showing persisted Actors

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